

Waste, Fraud and Abuse

Rick Larsen: June 13, 2006

I rise today as we re-examine why Congress and the administration diverted attention from our fight against terrorists and terrorism in order to invade Iraq.

The current Administration has gotten too many things wrong in Iraq and has totally misinterpreted the lessons of the post 9/11 world. It is now up to Democrats to get things right in Iraq so we can re-focus our military efforts to fighting terrorists around the world who want to harm us.

Today I ask my colleagues: Will we realistically confront terrorists and terrorism with all the elements of our national power or will we continue to ignore a proven approach to follow a shop worn, idealistic approach that drains our military of its resources and America of its goodwill with the very partners we need to fight terrorists? That is the choice our country faces in Iraq and in our national security.

The Administration has made countless mistakes since the start of the war in Iraq. As Congress looks to clean up the mistakes that have been made, Democrats must speak out against this Administration's tendency to overlook problems and push for a policy that centers on oversight of U.S. taxpayer dollars. We must respond to public frustrations by creating a secure future for our military and re-establish a foundation for American efforts to fight terrorists and terrorism across the globe.

To create this foundation and provide Americans with the oversight they deserve, Congress must confront and repair the waste, fraud and abuse that plagues our efforts in Iraq. We need to emphasize that our commitment to U.S. taxpayers is equally as important as the commitment we made to the Iraqi people.

I ask the American people to consider the legacy this administration handed us in our defense budget, as we spend billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars without the tools and ability to track these dollars. Will we tolerate the squeeze that will force choices between weapons and warriors because of a lack of administration foresight and lack of congressional oversight?

I believe the answer is no.

We must consider the legacy of Waste, Fraud and Abuse in Iraq.

- Eighteen billion U.S. taxpayer dollars has not purchased \$18 billion dollars worth of economic development in Iraq
- The United States has spent \$1.8 billion on electricity reconstruction projects so far. However, electricity generation in Iraq has dropped from a pre-war capacity of 4.5 thousand megawatts to just under four thousand megawatts and the average number of hours of power available per day has decreased by almost 20 hours in Baghdad.
- The United States has spent \$690 million on water sanitation projects in Iraq. However, the percentage of Iraqis with access to potable water has fallen from 50% before the start of the war to a current rate of 32%.
- The United States has spent over \$75 million to restore an oil pipeline that was poorly planned and was subsequently destroyed by our own bombs.

No one suggests the lack of progress in Iraq falls on the shoulders of our men and women in the military. Consider the success of the Commanders Emergency Recovery Program to bring tangible projects to improve the quality of life of Iraqis.

But who is at fault? Why are we not getting results for our tax payer dollars?

We don't know, because the institution endowed by the Constitution that is responsible for protecting your tax payer dollars is practicing overlook instead of oversight. Parents who are monitoring their children on the Internet are providing more oversight than the U.S. Congress.

We learn of events and stories through the media once the waste, fraud, or abuses have reached comic proportions. We know that:

- Halliburton overcharged both the US government and the Development Fund for Iraq by over \$260 million for the delivery of fuel from Kuwait to Iraq.
- The Department of Justice brought criminal indictments against a former CPA contracting official, Robert Stein, and a contractor, Philip Bloom for a series of frauds costing taxpayers \$13 million.
- The Coalition Provisional Authority lost control of \$19.6 billion in Iraqi oil funds and a large amount of this funding is unaccounted for.

As Congress overlooks the expenditure of billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars in Iraq it ignores the responsibility to provide a secure future for our military and its veterans.

What will the Democrats Do? The first step in laying this foundation is by stepping back in to our historical role of oversight.

- We must create an oversight subcommittee in the Armed Services Committee to get a handle on Waste Fraud and Abuse
- We must support and hold up as an example successful reconstruction programs such as the Commander's Emergency Recovery Program and Provincial Reconstruction Teams.
- We must train Iraqi security forces enabling a systematic U.S. troop drawdown from Iraq, allowing U.S. to bring some folks home and redeploy others to places in the world to fight terrorists.

The greatest source of U.S. pride continues to be the women and men of our military. It took the voice of Democrats to highlight the need for increased up-armored humvees. And it took the voice of Democrats to push for more body armor for our troops. Democrats have trumped the Administration's efforts and struggled, in spite of tremendous opposition, to bring waste, fraud and abuse in Iraq to light.

I join my colleagues in commending our U.S. military, working in conjunction with Iraqi security and Iraqis themselves, for locating and eliminating Abu Musad al-Zarqawi. His terrorist violence is gone. But we have learned in Iraq that fighting a "classic guerrilla-type war" means that a victory like killing Zarqawi cannot be celebrated too long. Much remains to be done in Iraq and Democrats have to make right where the Administration has gone wrong. Our obligations compel us to ask the tough questions that are currently ignored.

